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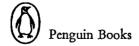
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Paul Celan: Selected Poems

Paul Celan was the pseudonym of Paul Anczel, who was born in Romanian Bukovina in 1920. His home town was occupied by Russian troops in 1940 and by the Germans in 1942. Both his parents were deported to an extermination camp, and Celan himself was sent to a labour camp. He survived, and moved to Paris in 1948 where he lived until his death. His first book of poems, Der Sand aus den Urnen (1948), was withdrawn after publication; his main work is contained in the collections Mohn und Gedächtnis (1952), Von Schwelle zu Schwelle (1955), Sprachgitter (1959), and Die Niemandsrose (1963). He also published translations of, among others, Rimbaud, Valéry and René Char. Paul Celan committed suicide in 1970.

# Paul Celan: Selected Poems

Translated by Michael Hamburger and Christopher Middleton, with an Introduction by Michael Hamburger



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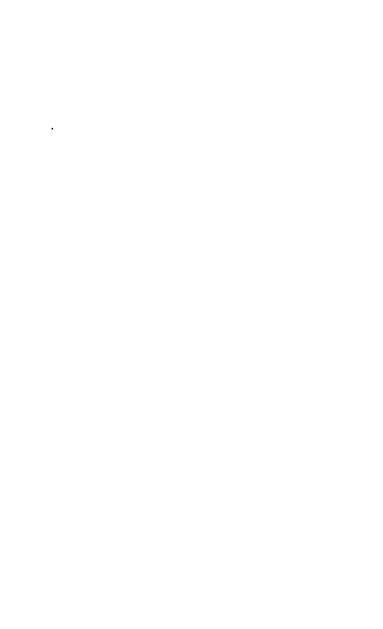
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Note: The translations marked (C.M.) are by Christopher Middleton. The others are by Michael Hamburger.



#### Introduction

From whichever direction we approach it - as plain readers of poetry, as critics or literary historians, as biographers or sociologists, or as translators - Paul Celan's work confronts us with difficulty and paradox. The more we try to concentrate on the poem itself, on its mode of utterance, which includes both theme and manner, the more clearly we see that difficulty and paradox are of its essence. As for 'placing' his work within the body of German literature after 1945, or against the larger background of international modernism, all we can be certain of at this point is that it occupies a prominent, isolated and anomalous position. With Nelly Sachs, this German poet, born of a Jewish family in Romania, shared an obvious preoccupation with the holocaust which he survived in body but not in spirit; and a not so obvious debt to Jewish history, tradition and mystical thought. Yet, apart from their essential differences in poetic practice, Nelly Sachs was a German poet before the holocaust turned her into a Jewish one. Like other assimilated German Jews she had to look for her Jewish heritage - with the help of Gentile friends, as it happened. Paul Celan spent his formative years in a Jewish community that had recently ceased to be within the boundaries of the Austrian Empire; and most of his productive years were spent in France. His poetic affinities were French, Russian and even English, as well as German. Among his German contemporaries, the one closest to him in sensibility and manner was Johannes Bobrowski, a resident in East Germany with distinctly Christian allegiances. Literary scholars and historians have only begun to survey Celan's background, to unravel his

complex affinities and uncover the sources of many seemingly cryptic allusions in his poems.

As a translator I have profited by their researches, particularly by those of Dietlind Meinecke and of Joachim Schulze, to whom my thanks are due. As a translator, again, and as a reader of Celan's work, I insist on the essential difficulty and paradox of his poetry. It is the difficulty and the paradox that demand a special attention to every word in his texts, and this attention is something other than what is normally meant by understanding. I am by no means sure that I have 'understood' even those of his poems – a very small part of his total output – which I was able to translate. But the darkness in Celan's poems, their leaps and bounds, their haltingness and their silences, all these are inseparable from their authenticity and their fascination.

Paul Anczel - 'Celan' was an anagram adopted in 1947 when his first poems appeared in a Romanian periodical was born at Czernowitz (now Chernovtsy), Bukovina, on 23 November 1920. After attending school there he paid his first visit to France in 1938, as a medical student in Tours, but returned to Czernowitz in the following year to study Romance languages and literatures. In 1940 hishome town was occupied by Russian troops, but he was able to continue his studies until the following year, when German and Romanian forces took over and the Jews were herded into a ghetto. In 1942 his parents were deported to an extermination camp. Paul Celan managed to escape, but remained in a Romanian labour camp until he was able to return to Czernowitz, which had been re-occupied by the Russians, in December 1943. In the following year he took up his studies again until 1945, when he left the Soviet Union and settled in Bucharest as a translator and publisher's reader. In December 1947 he moved to Vienna.

and in July 1948 – after the publication of his first book of poems, which he later withdrew – he settled in Paris, where he took up the study of German literature, obtaining his *Licence ès Lettres* in 1950 and becoming a teacher of German literature at the École Normale Supérieure. After his marriage that year to Gisèle Lestrange, Paris remained his home until his suicide in April 1970, at the age of fortynine.

Most of the poems in his first collection were reprinted in Mohn und Gedächtnis, which appeared in West Germany in 1952 and won him immediate recognition, confirmed by an invitation to the Gruppe 47 in the same year. His next collection, Von Schwelle zu Schwelle, followed in 1955. Between 1957 and 1967 Celan received a number of prizes and awards, including the Georg Büchner Prize in 1960. A speech delivered by Celan on that occasion, Der Meridian, is one of the very few prose pieces which he published and an important comment on his own work. With the publication of Sprachgitter (1959) and Die Niemandsrose (1963) Celan's work moved into a second phase. These two crucial and central collections were followed by Atemwende (1967), Fadensonnen (1968) and, posthumously, by Lichtzwang (1970) and Schneepart (1971). Celan's many translations into German included poems by Rimbaud and Valéry, Apollinaire, Michaux and André du Bouchet; a selection from Shakespeare's sonnets, and poems by Emily Dickinson and Marianne Moore; and selections of poems by Blok, Mandelshtam and Yesenin. At an earlier period he published translations into Romanian of Russian prose works.

These basic facts of Celan's biography may indicate something of the anomaly and extremity of his position as a poet. What the facts do not reveal, and his productivity seems to belie, is that the loss of his parents and his early

experience of persecution left indelible scars. Throughout his later years he suffered acute crises and breakdowns that seriously affected both his personal and his professional life. One such crisis occurred soon after his emergence as a poet, when he was accused of having plagiarized the work of Yvan Goll, the Franco-German poet with whom Celan became personally acquainted in 1949. Since Celan's early poems linked up both with German Expressionism and French Surrealism, movements with which Goll had been associated, certain stylistic features were bound to be common to both poets. If Celan had not been predisposed towards paranoia, the foolish and protracted controversy that ensued could not have hurt him; as it was, it obsessed and unbalanced him to a degree far in excess of the cause. I recall a later meeting with Celan when he was similarly obsessed with the 'treachery' of one of his publishers, who had decided to re-issue the poems of a ballad-writer popular during the Nazi régime. Towards the end of his life the crises became more violent and more disruptive.

Paul Celan was not a confessional poet. Even in the early Fugue of Death, his most famous and most widely anthologized poem, the personal anguish is transposed into distancing imagery and a musical structure so intricate that a kind of 'terrible beauty' is wrested from the ugly theme. Realists and literalists among Celan's critics objected to this 'aestheticizing' of the death camps. Yet the power of the poem arises from the extreme tension between its grossly impure material and its almost pure form. A great deal has been written about the impossibility of writing poems after Auschwitz, let alone about Auschwitz. Even Celan could not do so directly, realistically, but only by an art of contrast and paradox that celebrates beauty and energy while commemorating their destruction. Though he turned against his Fugue of Death in later years,

refusing permission to have it reprinted in more anthologies, it was because he had refined his art in the meantime to a point where the *Fugue of Death* seemed too direct, too realistic. Yet the anguish, the darkness, the shadow of death are present in all his poems, early and late, including the most high-spirited and sensuous.

The aspiration towards a pure or absolute poetry was pervasive in France among poets of almost every school, and it was not necessarily felt to be incompatible with political and ethical commitments. Like Paul Eluard and René Char, among the French poets to whom Celan felt close, he did not feel constrained to sacrifice the freedom of his art to an 'engagement' beyond it. At his most difficult, most elliptic and paradoxical, he insisted that he was not a hermetic poet but one out to communicate, describing his poems as 'ways of a voice to a receptive you', a 'desperate dialogue' and 'a sort of homecoming'. Another way of putting it is that his poetry never ceased to be rooted in experience, extreme experience that could not be enacted in any manner less difficult than his. The hiatuses, the silences, the dislocations of normal usage belong to what he had to say and to the effort of saying it.

If Celan's poems were meant to be hermetic they would be less difficult, since they would save us the effort of making sense of them. That is why the earlier verse, though purer, is less difficult than the later. Any reader familiar with the kind of poetry whose progression is one of imagery rather than argument will know how to read the earlier poems, whose diction too is closer to established conventions. From *Sprachgitter* onwards the images grow sparser and more idiosyncratic, the syntax more broken, the message at once more urgent and more reticent. The existing resources of language become inadequate. Celan begins to coin new words, especially compound words,

and to divide other words into their component syllables, each of which acquires a new weight. The process of condensation and dislocation is carried further in the following collections. Both verse lines and whole poems tend to grow shorter and shorter.

One exception, the long poem The Straitening, exemplifies the change. Its German title, Engführung, is a technical term for a device employed in the composition of fugues. Its counterpart in English usage would have been the Italian word 'stretto'. This points to the precedent of Celan's earlier poem Fugue of Death, and a comparison between the two longer poems shows just how daring, condensed and cryptic Celan's art had grown in the thirteen years separating them. Although the form of the later poem is an even closer approximation to fugal composition with words, I decided not to use the technical term for the title. (The French translation by Jean Daive, which was authorized by Celan, does use the technical term, Strette.) A German reader of the original text not versed in the art of counterpoint would take the title more literally as a 'narrowing' or reduction; and since this wider, thematic connotation would not be conveyed by the strictly musical term, I looked for an English word that would at least suggest it. Ambiguity, in any case, occurs throughout this poem.

The later poems included in the present selection are those that were not rendered totally untranslatable by ambiguity, play on words or a degree of uncertainty as to what the poem is about that would have made translation little more than guesswork. It was a question not of whether I could catch this allusion or that – many must have escaped me even in poems which I did translate – but whether I could respond to the gesture of a poem as a whole. If the gesture of the poem made sense, the oddities

of diction and usage, including the ambiguities, could usually be reproduced in English, with certain modifications due to the different characters of the two languages. German, for instance, lends itself to the formation of compound words in a way that English does not. German also permits nouns to be preceded by complete clauses that qualify them, a peculiarity of the language that was especially congenial to Celan when the movement of his poem had come to be governed by breath units rather than by metrical or syntactic units.

Und du:
du, du, du
mein täglich wahr- und wahrergeschundenes Später
der Rosen --:

where the German capitalization of nouns helps to bring out that the adjective 'später' has been turned into a noun, has had to be transposed as follows:

> And you: you, you, you my later of roses daily worn true and more true -:

A structurally faithful rendering would have demanded:

And you: you, you, you my daily true- and truerworn later of (the) roses -:

with the added substitution of a stronger word than 'worn' to convey the sense of misuse or abuse implied by the German word 'geschunden'.

Those lines are from a poem of Celan's middle period.

More puzzling neologisms abound in the later collections, as in this short poem, Once:

Once I heard him, he was washing the world, unseen, nightlong, real.

One and Infinite, annihilated, ied. Light was. Salvation.

The German word corresponding to 'ied' is 'ichten'. Since it comes after 'vernichtet' (annihilated) it could be the infinitive of a verb that is the positive counterpart of 'annihilate', and that is how it was construed by a reviewer for The Times Literary Supplement, who translated it as 'ihilate'. This new verb would not be more far-fetched than other neologisms of Celan's, since in Middle High German, which he knew, there was a positive 'iht' (aught) corresponding to the negative 'niht' (nought). My authority for 'ied' is Paul Celan himself. When I last met him, in April 1968, he was convinced that I was the author of the anonymous review in question and would not accept my repeated denial. He explained that 'ichten' was formed from the personal pronoun 'ich', so that it was the third person plural of the imperfect tense of a verb 'ichen' ('to i'). An equally ambiguous word formation is to be found in the poem Etched Away From, but Celan did not comment on the translation offered by the same reviewer of Atemwende. I refer to

> das hundertzüngige Meingedicht, das Genicht

#### rendered there as

the hundredtongued mypoem, the noem.

'Mein-gedicht' could indeed mean 'my-poem', but it could also mean 'false poem' or 'pseudo-poem', by analogy with the German word 'Meineid', a false oath. Possibly Celan had both senses in mind when he coined the word. In translation the ambiguity had to be resolved, and after much pondering I decided in favour of 'pseudo-poem', although 'Meineid' is the only modern German word that preserves this sense of 'mein'. Paul Celan was a learned poet with an outstandingly rich vocabulary derived more from reading than from practice in the vernacular, since he spent little time in German-speaking countries. Since he also knew Yiddish, he was closer to the medieval roots of the German language than contemporaries who grew up in Germany.

Negation is a strikingly recurrent feature not only of Celan's new word-formations but of his later poetry in general. The seemingly negative theology of his great poem *Psalm* has been shown to have antecedents in both Jewish and Christian mysticism, and Celan is known to have been well versed in both. Less explicitly than in *Psalm*, something of this theology is prefigured in early poems like *The Jugs*. Celan's religion – and there can be no doubt as to his profoundly religious sensibility, whatever he may have believed or not believed – had to come to grips with the experience of being God-forsaken. Negation and blasphemy were the means by which Celan could be true to that experience and yet maintain the kind of intimate dialogue with God characteristic of Jewish devotion.

At the same time negation and paradox served him as a

basic stylistic principle, as expounded in the early poem *Speak*, *You Also*. In that poem he exhorts himself to 'keep yes and no unsplit', to admit enough darkness into his poems, because 'he speaks truly who speaks the shade'. With its dialectic of light and darkness, life and death, this poem anticipates the whole of Celan's subsequent development, as well as linking the formal aspects of that development – the reduction carried further from book to book – with the inner necessity from which they arose:

Thinner you grow, less knowable, finer.

This applies to the poems as much as to the poet; and so does the star image, towards the end of the poem, that stands for the urge towards the transcendence and resolution of paradox present in Celan's work right up to the posthumous collections.

One thing sets Paul Celan's work apart from that of most of his German coevals: he had hardly any use for realism of a kind that merely imitates and reproduces, for what Northrop Frye has called 'the low mimetic'. Direct social comment is not to be found in his work, though it became increasingly realistic in a different sense - the widening of its vocabulary to include twentieth century phenomena and technologies. From Die Niemandsrose onwards invective becomes prominent in Celan's poems, though the invective is as rich in cryptic allusions and intricate word-play as every other mode that he employed. He was realistic, too, in doing full justice to 'the foul ragand-bone shop of the heart'. Yet the 'inwardness' of his poetry places it in a line of descent that runs from Hölderlin through Rilke to Expressionism. As a very short late poem attests, he found Brecht's poetry of social and political comment too 'explicit'. One reason is that he wanted poetry to be open to the unexpected, the unpredictable,

the unpredeterminable. His poems were 'messages in a bottle', as he said, which might or might not be picked up. That element of risk was as necessary to them as the need to communicate. On the few occasions when he spoke about poetry in public he spoke of it as a process, a groping forward, a search. Paradoxically once more, he spoke of its practice, and the practice of any art, as a driving of the practitioner into the 'inmost recess of himself', his narrowest place, and as a 'setting free'. That, incidentally, is one reason why the title of his poem *Engführung* means more than the technical term 'stretto' could possibly convey to an English reader.

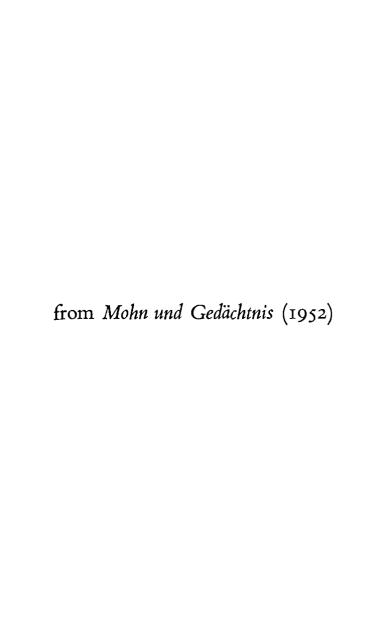
No feature of Celan's later poems is more characteristic of their openness and mysteriousness than their unidentified personal pronouns, the 'you' that can be the woman addressed in a love poem or an alter ego or a deity; the 'he', 'she' or 'they' that enters a poem without any introduction or explanation. Most of these persons have no existence or significance outside the poem. It is the poem that creates them or discovers them. A reader can either relate himself to them through his own experience and imagination or he can not, in which case the message in the bottle has not reached him. If it does reach him it will tell him something of which he was not aware before reading it. That is the distinction of poetry like Celan's, poetry always close to the unutterable because it has passed through it and come out on the other side.

Such poetry demands a special kind of attention and perhaps a special kind of faith in the authenticity of what it enacts. Without a similar attention and faith it could not have been written, since the risk is shared by writer and reader. Speaking about poetry, Celan quoted this definition by Malebranche: 'Attention is the natural prayer of the soul.' It was this quality of attention that I had in mind

when I referred to Celan's religious sensibility. The more we read Celan's poems, the more his kind of attention imposes itself as the only adequate response to them.

The present selection from Celan's successive collections, with its inevitable concentrations on poems more easily accessible than many others, could not encompass the full range of his work, which becomes most rewarding when read in its entirety. We need to know his recurrent images before we can appreciate their modifications and transmutations from poem to poem. This book will serve its purpose if it permits English readers to make a start. It seems very likely that Celan's work will be widely translated, for a long time to come.

MICHAEL HAMBURGER



#### Tallow Lamp

The monks with hairy fingers opened the book: September.

Now Jason pelts with snow the newly sprouting grain. The forest gave you a necklace of hands. So dead you walk the rope.

To your hair a darker blue is imparted; I speak of love. Shells I speak and light clouds, and a boat buds in the rain.

A little stallion gallops across the leafing fingers – Black the gate leaps open, I sing; How did we live here?

### Your Hand Full of Hours

Your hand full of hours, you came to me - and I said: Your hair is not brown.

So you lifted it lightly on to the scales of grief; it weighed more than I...

On ships they come to you and make it their cargo, then put it on sale in the markets of lust –

You smile at me from the depth, I weep at you from the scale that stays light.

I weep: Your hair is not brown, they offer brine from the sea and you give them curls ...

You whisper: They're filling the world with me now, in your heart I'm a hollow way still!

You say: Lay the leafage of years beside you – it's time you came closer and kissed me!

The leafage of years is brown, your hair is not brown.

#### Aspen Tree...

Aspen tree, your leaves glance white into the dark. My mother's hair was never white.

Dandelion, so green is the Ukraine. My yellow-haired mother did not come home.

Rain cloud, above the well do you hover? My quiet mother weeps for everyone.

Round star, you wind the golden loop. My mother's heart was ripped by lead.

Oaken door, who lifted you off your hinges? My gentle mother cannot return.

### Sand from the Urns

Green as mould is the house of oblivion.

Before each of the blowing gates your beheaded minstrel turns blue.

For you he beats his drum made of moss and of harsh pubic hair;

With a festering toe in the sand he traces your eyebrow. Longer he draws it than ever it was, and the red of your lip.

You fill up the urns here and nourish your heart.

### In the Cherry-Tree's Branches ...

In the cherry-tree's branches a crunching of iron shoes. Summer foams up for you out of helmets. The blackish cuckoo

with diamond spurs draws his image on to the gates of the sky.

Bareheaded the horseman looms up from the foliage. On his shield he bears the dusk of your smile, nailed on to the enemy's kerchief of steel. The garden of dreamers was promised to him, and spears he keeps ready, so that the rose will climb...

But unshod through the air comes he who resembles you most;

iron shoes buckled on to his delicate hands, he sleeps through the battle and summer. It's for him that the cherry bleeds.

#### Memory of France

Together with me recall: the sky of Paris, that giant autumn crocus . . .

We went shopping for hearts at the flower girl's booth: they were blue and they opened up in the water.

It began to rain in our room,

and our neighbour came in, Monsieur Le Songe, a lean little man.

We played cards, I lost the irises of my eyes; you lent me your hair, I lost it, he struck us down. He left by the door, the rain followed him out. We were dead and were able to breathe.

## Chanson of a Lady in the Shade

When the silent one comes and beheads the tulips: Who wins?

Who loses?

Who walks to the window? Who's the first to speak her name?

He is one who wears my hair.

He wears it much as one wears the dead on one's hands.

He wears it much as the sky wore my hair that year when I loved.

He wears it like that out of vanity.

That one wins.

Doesn't lose.

Doesn't walk to the window. He does not speak her name.

He is one who has my eyes.

He's had them since gates have shut.

He wears them like rings on his fingers.

He wears them like shards of sapphire and lust;

Since the autumn he has been my brother;

He's counting the days and the nights.

That one wins.

Doesn't lose.

Doesn't walk to the window. He's the last to speak her name.

He's one who has what I said. He carries it under his arm like a bundle. He carries it as the clock carries its worst hour. From threshold to threshold he carries it, never throws it away.

That one doesn't win.

He loses.

He walks to the window. He's the first to speak her name.

With tulips that one's beheaded.

### Night Ray

Most brightly of all burned the hair of my evening loved one;

to her I send the coffin of lightest wood.

Waves billow round it as round the bed of our dream in Rome;

it wears a white wig as I do and speaks hoarsely: it talks as I do when I grant admittance to hearts. It knows a French song about love, I sang it in autumn when I stopped as a tourist in Lateland and wrote my letters to morning.

A fine boat is that coffin carved in the coppice of feelings.

I too drift in it downbloodstream, younger still than your eye.

Now you are young as a bird dropped dead in March snow,

now it comes to you, sings you its love song from France.

You are light: you will sleep through my Spring till it's over.

I am lighter:

in front of strangers I sing.

#### The Years from You to Me

Your hair waves once more when I weep. With the blue of your eyes

you lay the table of love: a bed between summer and autumn.

We drink what somebody brewed neither I nor you nor a third; we lap up some empty and last thing.

We watch ourselves in the deep sea's mirrors and faster pass food to the other: the night is the night, it begins with the morning, beside you it lays me down.

#### Corona

Autumn eats its leaf out of my hand: we are friends. From the nuts we shell time and we teach it to walk: then time returns to the shell.

In the mirror it's Sunday, in dream there is room for sleeping, our mouths speak the truth.

My eye moves down to the sex of my loved one: we look at each other, we exchange dark words, we love each other like poppy and recollection, we sleep like wine in the conches, like the sea in the moon's blood ray.

We stand by the window embracing, and people look up from the street: it is time they knew! It is time the stone made an effort to flower, time unrest had a beating heart. It is time it were time.

It is time.

## Fugue of Death

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at nightfall we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night drink it and drink it

we are digging a grave in the sky it is ample to lie there A man in the house he plays with the serpents he writes he writes when the night falls to Germany your golden hair Margarete

he writes it and walks from the house the stars glitter he whistles his dogs up

he whistles his Jews out and orders a grave to be dug in the earth

he commands us strike up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night we drink in the mornings at noon we drink you at nightfall

drink you and drink you

A man in the house he plays with the serpents he writes he writes when the night falls to Germany your golden hair Margarete

Your ashen hair Shulamith we are digging a grave in the sky it is ample to lie there

He shouts stab deeper in earth you there and you others you sing and you play

he grabs at the iron in his belt and swings it and blue are his eyes

stab deeper your spades you there and you others play on for the dancing Black milk of daybreak we drink you at nightfall we drink you at noon in the mornings we drink you at nightfall

drink you and drink you a man in the house your golden hair Margarete your ashen hair Shulamith he plays with the serpents

He shouts play sweeter death's music death comes as a master from Germany

he shouts stroke darker the strings and as smoke you shall climb to the sky

then you'll have a grave in the clouds it is ample to lie there

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night we drink you at noon death comes as a master from Germany

we drink you at nightfall and morning we drink you and drink you

a master from Germany death comes with eyes that are blue

with a bullet of lead he will hit in the mark he will hit you

a man in the house your golden hair Margarete he hunts us down with his dogs in the sky he gives us a

grave e plays with the serpents and dreams death

he plays with the serpents and dreams death comes as a master from Germany

your golden hair Margarete your ashen hair Shulamith.

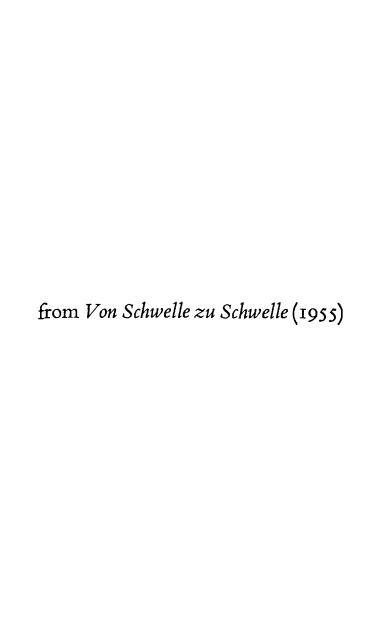
# Crystal

Not on my lips look for your mouth, not in front of the gate for the stranger, not in the eye for the tear.

Seven nights higher red makes for red, seven hearts deeper the hand knocks on the gate, seven roses later the fountain begins to plash.

## The Jugs

At the long tables of time
the jugs of God carouse.
They drink empty the eyes that see and the eyes of the
blind,
the hearts of the mastering shadows,
the hollow cheek of the evening.
They are the most mighty carousers:
they carry empty and full alike to their mouths
and do not flow over like you or like me.



#### From Darkness to Darkness

You opened your eyes - I saw my darkness live. I see through it down to the bed; there too it is mine and lives.

Is that a ferry? Which, crossing, awakens? Whose light can it be at my heels for a boatman to appear?

### With a Variable Key

With a variable key you unlock the house in which drifts the snow of that left unspoken. Always what key you choose depends on the blood that spurts from your eye or your mouth or your ear.

You vary the key, you vary the word that is free to drift with the flakes. What snowball will form round the word depends on the wind that rebuffs you.

#### In Memoriam Paul Eluard

Lay these words into the dead man's grave which he spoke in order to live. Pillow his head amid them, let him feel the tongues of longing, the tongs.

Lay that word on the dead man's eyelids which he refused to him who addressed him as thou, the word his leaping heart-blood passed by when a hand as bare as his own knotted him who addressed him as thou into the trees of the future.

Lay this word on his eyelids: perhaps his eye, still blue, will assume a second, more alien blueness, and he who addressed him as thou will dream with him: We.

### Shibboleth

Together with my stones grown big with weeping behind the bars,

they dragged me out into the middle of the market, that place where the flag unfurls to which I swore no kind of allegiance.

Flute, double flute of night: remember the dark twin redness of Vienna and Madrid.

Set your flag at half-mast, memory. At half-mast today and for ever.

#### Heart:

here too reveal what you are, here, in the midst of the market. Call the shibboleth, call it out into your alien homeland: February. No pasaran.

# Unicorn: you know about the stones,

you know about the water; come, I shall lead you away to the voices of Estremadura.

### Speak, You Also

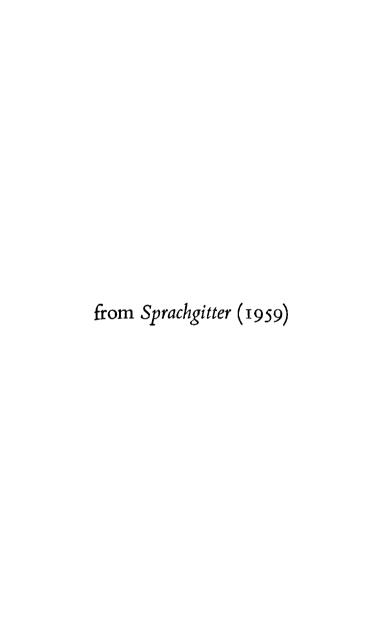
Speak, you also, speak as the last, have your say.

Speak But keep yes and no unsplit,
And give your say this meaning:
give it the shade.

Give it shade enough, give it as much as you know has been dealt out between midday and midday and midnight.

Look around: look how it all leaps alive – where death is! Alive! He speaks truly who speaks the shade.

But now shrinks the place where you stand: Where now, stripped by shade, will you go? Upward. Grope your way up. Thinner you grow, less knowable, finer. Finer: a thread by which it wants to be lowered, the star: to float further down, down below where it sees itself glitter: on sand dunes of wandering words.



## Homecoming

Snowfall, denser and denser, dove-coloured as yesterday, snowfall, as if even now you were sleeping.

White, stacked into distance. Above it, endless, the sleigh track of the lost.

Below, hidden, presses up what so hurts the eyes, hill upon hill, invisible.

On each, fetched home into its today, an I slipped away into dumbness: wooden, a post.

There: a feeling, blown across by the ice wind attaching its dove- its snowcoloured cloth as a flag.

#### Below

Led home into oblivion the sociable talk of our slow eyes.

Led home, syllable after syllable, shared out among the dayblind dice, for which the playing hand reaches out, large, awakening.

And the too much of my speaking: heaped up round the little crystal dressed in the style of your silence.

#### Tenebrae

We are near, Lord, near and at hand.

Handled already, Lord, clawed and clawing as though the body of each us were your body, Lord.

Pray, Lord, pray to us, we are near.

Wind-awry we went there, went there to bend over hollow and ditch.

To be watered we went there, Lord.

It was blood, it was what you shed, Lord.

It gleamed.

It cast your image into our eyes, Lord. Our eyes and our mouths are open and empty, Lord.

We have drunk, Lord. The blood and the image that was in the blood, Lord.

Pray, Lord. We are near.

### Flower

The stone in the air, which I followed. Your eye, as blind as the stone.

We were hands, we baled the darkness empty, we found the word that ascended summer: flower.

Flower – a blind man's word. Your eye and mine: they see to water.

Growth. Heart wall upon heart wall adds petals to it.

One more word like this word, and the hammers will swing over open ground.

# Language Mesh

Eye's roundness between the bars.

Vibratile monad eyelid propels itself upward, releases a glance.

Iris, swimmer, dreamless and dreary: the sky, heart-grey, must be near.

Athwart, in the iron holder, the smoking splinter. By its sense of light you divine the soul.

(If I were like you. If you were like me. Did we not stand under one trade wind?

We are strangers.)

The flagstones. On them, close to each other, the two heart-grey puddles: two mouthsfull of silence.

## Night

Pebbles and scree. And a shard note, thin, as the hour's message of comfort.

Exchange of eyes, finite, at the wrong time: image-constant, lignified the retina -: the sign of eternity.

Conceivable: up there, in the cosmic network of rails, like stars, the red of two mouths.

Audible (before dawn?): a stone that made the other its target.

### Matière de Bretagne

Gorselight, yellow, the slopes fester to heaven, the thorn woos the wound, bells ring in there, it is evening, the void rolls its ocean to worship, the sail of blood is aiming for you.

Dry, stranded the stream-bed behind you, reed-choked its moment, above by the star, the milky creeks gossip in mud, stone-borer below, bunched, gapes at blue, a shrub of transience, beautiful, admits welcoming your memory.

(Did you know me, hands? I took the forked way you showed, my mouth spat its macadam, I walked, my time, ambling patrols, cast its shadow – did you know me?)

Hands, the wound wooed by the thorn, bells ring, hands, the void, its oceans, hands, in the gorselight, the sail of blood is aiming for you.

You

you teach you teach your hands you teach your hands you teach you teach your hands sleep

### All Souls

What did I do?
Seminated the night, as though there could be others, more nocturnal than this one.

Bird flight, stone flight, a thousand described routes. Glances, purloined and plucked. The sea, tasted, drunk away, dreamed away. An hour soul-eclipsed. The next, an autumn light, offered up to a blind feeling which came that way. Others, many, with no place but their own heavy centres: glimpsed and avoided. Foundlings, stars, black, full of language: named after an oath which silence annulled.

And once (when? that too is forgotten): felt the barb where my pulse dared the counter-beat.

### Draft of a Landscape

Circular graves, below. In four-beat time the year's pace on the steep steps around them.

Lavas, basalts, glowing stone from the world's heart. Wellspring tuff where light grew for us, before our breath.

Oilgreen, soaked with sea spray the impassable hour. Toward the centre, grey, a stone saddle, and on it, dented and charred, the animal forehead with its radiant blaze.

### An Eye, Open

Hours, May-coloured, cool. The no more to be named, hot, audible in the mouth.

No one's voice, again.

Aching depth of the eyeball: the lid does not stand in its way, the lash does not count what goes in.

The tear, half, the sharper lens, movable, brings the images home to you.

## The Straitening

\*

Driven into the terrain with the unmistakable track:

grass, written asunder. The stones, white, with the shadows of grassblades:
Do not read any more – look!
Do not look any more – go!

Go, your hour
has no sisters, you are are at home. A wheel, slow,
rolls out of itself, the spokes
climb,
climb on a blackish field, the night
needs no stars, nowhere
does anyone ask after you.

\*

Nowhere

does anyone ask after you -

The place where they lay, it has a name – it has none. They did not lie there. Something lay between them. They did not see through it.

Did not see, no, spoke of

words. None awoke, sleep came over them.

\*

Came, came. Nowhere anyone asks –

It is I, I,
I lay between you, I was
open, was
audible, ticked at you, your breathing
obeyed, it is
I still, but then
you are asleep.

\*

It is I still -

years, years, a finger feels down and up, feels around: seams, palpable, here it is split wide open, here it grew together again – who covered it up?

\*

Covered it

up - who?

Came, came.

Came a word, came, came through the night, wanted to shine, wanted to shine.

Ash.
Ash, ash.
Night.
Night-and-night. - Go
to the eye, the moist one.

\*

Go

to the eye,

the moist one -

Gales.
Gales, from the beginning of time, whirl of particles, the other, you know it, though, we read it in the book, was opinion.

Was, was opinion. How did we touch each other – each other with these hands?

There was written too, that. Where? We put a silence over it, stilled with poison, great, a green silence, a sepal, an idea of vegetation attached to it – green, yes, attached, yes, under a crafty sky.

Of, yes, vegetation.

Yes.
Gales, whirl of particles, there was time left, time to try it out with the stone – it was hospitable, it did not cut in. How lucky we were:

Grainy,
grainy and stringy. Stalky,
dense;
grapy and radiant; kidneyish,
flattish and
lumpy; loose, tangled -; he, it
did not cut in, it
spoke,
willingly spoke to dry eyes, before closing them,

Spoke, spoke. Was, was.

We would not let go, stood

in the midst, a porous edifice, and it came.

Came at us, came through us, patched invisibly, patched away at the last membrane and the world, a millicrystal, shot up, shot up.

\*

Shot up, shot up.

Then -

Nights, demixed. Circles, green or blue, scarlet squares: the world puts its inmost reserves into the game with the new hours. – Circles, red or black, bright squares, no flight shadow, no measuring table, no smoke soul ascends or joins in.

\*

Ascends and

joins in -

At owl's flight, near the petrified scabs, near our fled hands, in the latest rejection, above the rifle-range near the buried wall:

visible, once more: the grooves, the

choirs, at that time, the psalms. Ho, ho-sannah.

So there are temples yet. A star probably still has light. Nothing, nothing is lost.

Hosannah.

At owl's flight, here, the conversations, day-grey, of the water-level traces.

\*

(- - day-grey,

of

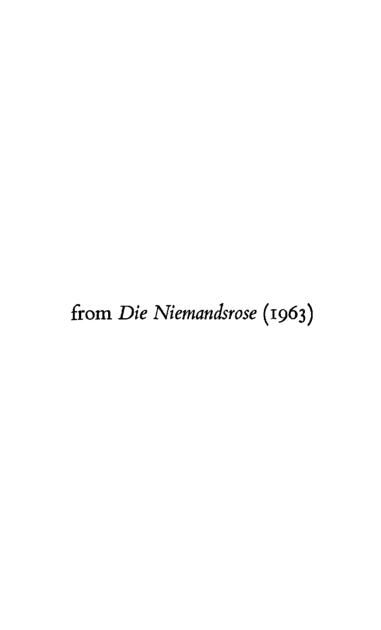
the water-level traces -

Driven into the terrain

with the unmistakable track:

Grass, grass, written asunder.)





#### There was Earth

There was earth inside them, and they dug.

They dug and they dug, so their day went by for them, their night. And they did not praise God who, so they heard, wanted all this, who, so they heard, knew all this.

They dug and heard nothing more; they did not grow wise, invented no song, thought up for themselves no language. They dug.

There came a stillness, and there came a storm, and all the oceans came.

I dig, you dig, and the worm digs too, and that singing out there says: They dig.

O one, o none, o no one, o you: Where did the way lead when it led nowhere? O you dig and I dig, and I dig towards you, and on our finger the ring awakes.

### Zürich, the Stork Inn

For Nelly Sachs

Of too much was our talk, of too little. Of the You and You-Again, of how clarity troubles, of Jewishness, of your God.

Of that.
On the day of an ascension, the Minster stood over there, it sent some gold across the water.

Of your God was our talk, I spoke against him, I let the heart that I had hope: for his highest, death-rattled, his quarrelling word -

Your eye looked on, looked away, your mouth spoke its way to the eye, and I heard:

We don't know, you know, we don't know, do we?, what counts.

## So Many Constellations

So many constellations that are held out to us. I was, when I looked at you – when? – outside by the other worlds.

O these ways, galactic.
O this hour, that weighed nights over for us into the burden of our names. It is, I know, not true that we lived, there moved, blindly, no more than a breath between there and not-there, and at times our eyes whirred comet-like toward things extinguished, in chasms, and where they had burnt out, splendid with teats, stood Time on which already grew up and down and away all that is or was or will be -,

#### I know.

I know and you know, we knew, we did not know, we were there, after all, and not there and at times when only the void stood between us we got all the way to each other.

### Dumb Autumn Smells

Dumb autumn smells. The marguerite, unbroken, passed between home and chasm through your memory.

A strange lostness was palpably present, almost you would have lived.

#### Psalm

No one moulds us again out of earth and clay, no one conjures our dust.

No one.

Praised be your name, no one. For your sake we shall flower.
Towards
you.

A nothing we were, are, shall remain, flowering; the nothing-, the no one's rose.

With our pistil soul-bright with our stamen heaven-ravaged our corolla red with the crimson word which we sang over, o over the thorn.

#### Alchemical

Silence, cooked like gold, in charred hands.

Great, grey sisterly shape near like all that is lost:

All the names, all those names burnt with the rest. So much ash to be blessed. So much land won above the light, so light rings of souls.

Great, grey one. Cinder-less.

You, then. You with the pale bit-open bud, you in the wine-flood.

(Us too, don't you think, this clock dismissed?

Good.

#### good, how your word died past us here.)

Silence, cooked like gold, in charred, charred hands.

Fingers, insubstantial as smoke. Like crests, crest of air around --

Great, grey one. Wakeless. Regal one.

#### ... Plashes the Fountain

You prayer -, you blasphemy, you prayer-sharp knives of my silence.

You my words being crippled together with me, you my hale ones.

And you: you, you, you my later of roses daily worn true and more true -:

How much, O how much world. How many paths. You crutch, you wing. We. -

We shall sing the nursery rhyme, that one, do you hear, that one with the hu, with the man, with the human being, the one with the scrub and with the pair of eyes that lay ready there as tear-upon-tear.

### Radix, Matrix

As one speaks to stone, like you, from the chasm, from a home become a sister to me, hurled towards me, you, you that long ago you in the nothingness of a night, you in the multi-night encountered, you multi-you -:

At that time, when I was not there, at that time when you paced the ploughed field, alone:

Who, who was it, that lineage, the murdered, that looms black into the sky: rod and bulb -?

Root. Abraham's root. Jesse's root. No one's root – O ours.)

Yes, as one speaks to stone, as you with your hands grope into there, and into nothing, such is what is here:

this fertile
soil too gapes,
this
going down
is one of the
crests growing wild.

### Afternoon with a Circus and Citadel

In Brest, before hoops of flame, in the tent where the tiger leapt, there, Finite, I heard you sing there I saw you, Mandelshtam.

The sky hung above the roadstead, the gull hung above the crane. What is finite sang, what is constant - you, gunboat, are called 'Baobab'.

I saluted the tricolore speaking a Russian word – things lost were things not lost, the heart was a place made fast.

## In the Daytime

Hare's pelt sky. Even now a clear wing writes.

I too, remember, dustcoloured one, arrived as a crane.

#### Crowned Out . . .

Crowned out, spewed out into night.

Under what stars! So much grey-beaten heart-hammer silver. And Berenice's head of hair, here too. – I plaited, I unplaited, I plait, unplait. I plait.

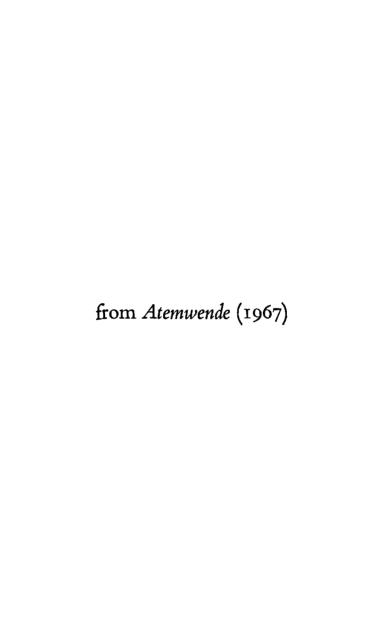
Blue chasm, into you
I drive the gold. Bringing that too
wasted on whores and harlots
I go and go. To you,
beloved.

And with curses and prayer. And with each of the cudgels whirring over me: they too fused into one, they too phallically bunched towards you, both sheaf and word.

With names, watered by every exile. With names and seeds, with names dipped into all the calyxes that are full of your regal blood, man, – into all the calyxes of the great ghetto-rose, from which you look at us, immortal with so many deaths died on morning errands.

(And we sang the Warshawyanka with lips grown reedy, Petrarca. Into tundra-ears, Petrarca.)

And an earth rises up; ours, this one.
And we'll send none of our people down to you,
Babel.



#### To Stand. . .

To stand, in the shadow of the scar up in the air.

To stand-for-no-one-and-nothing. Unrecognized, for you alone.

With all there is room for in that, even without language.

### Thread Suns

Thread suns above the grey-black wilderness. A tree-high thought tunes in to light's pitch: there are still songs to be sung on the other side of mankind.

### Etched Away From

Etched away from the ray-shot wind of your language the garish talk of rubbedoff experience – the hundredtongued pseudopoem, the noem.

Whirled clear, free your way through the human-shaped snow, the penitents' snow, to the hospitable glacier rooms and tables.

Deep in time's crevasse by the alveolate ice waits, a crystal of breath, your irreversible witness.

### On the White Philactery

On the white philactery - the Lord of this hour was a winter creature, for his sake happened what happened my climbing mouth bit and locked, once again, looking for you, smoke trail above me, you, in the shape of a woman, you on your way to my fire thoughts in the black shingle on the other side of dividing words, through which I saw you walk, longlegged and your thick-lipped own head on my body alive by dint of my deadly accurate hands.

Tell your fingers that
accompany you down into
chasms even, how
I knew you, how far
I pushed you into the deep, where
my most bitter dream
slept with you from the heart, in the bed
of my undetachable name.

#### Go Blind Now

Go blind now, today:
eternity also is full of eyes —
in them
drowns what helped images down
the way they came,
in them
fades what took you out of language,
lifted you out with a gesture
which you allowed to happen like
the dance of the words made of
autumn and silk and nothingness.

### In Prague

That half-death, suckled big with our life, lay around us, true as an ashen image –

we too still drank, soul-crossed, two daggers, sewn on to stones of the sky, born of word blood in the night bed,

bigger and bigger
we grew interlaced, there was
no longer a name for
that which drove us (one of the how many
and thirty
was my live shadow
that climbed the delusory steps towards you?),

a tower the halved one built for himself into where, a Hradshin made of pure gold-makers' No,

bone-Hebrew
ground into sperm
ran through the hourglass
through which we swam, two dreams now, chiming
against time, in the squares.

#### Once

Once I heard him, he was washing the world, unseen, nightlong, real.

One and Infinite, annihilated, ied. Light was. Salvation. from Fadensonnen (1968)

## You Were My Death

You were my death: you I could hold when all fell away from me.

### To My Right

To my right - who? The deathwoman. And you, to my left, you?

The travelling-sickles at the extracelestial place mime themselves whitish-grey into moon swallows, into star swifts,

I dip to that place and pour an urnful down you, into you.

#### Irish

Give me the right of way over the corn steps into your sleep, the right of way over the sleep path, the right to cut peat on the heart slope, tomorrow.

#### Dew...

Dew. And I lay with you, you, amid garbage, a mushy moon pelted us with answers,

we crumbled apart and crumbled into one again:

the Lord broke the bread, the bread broke the Lord.

#### Powers. Dominions.

Behind them, in the bamboo: barking leprosy, symphonic.

Vincent's posted ear has reached its destination.

### Think of It\*

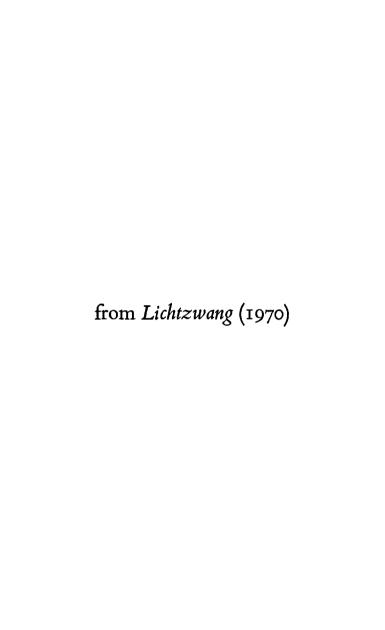
Think of it: the bog soldier of Massada teaches himself home, most inextinguishably, against every barb in the wire.

Think of it: the eyeless with no shape lead you free through the tumult, you grow stronger and stronger.

Think of it: your own hand has held this bit of habitable earth, suffered up again into life.

Think of it: this came towards me, name-awake, hand-awake, for ever, from the unburiable.

\*The poem associates a remote event in Jewish history, the last attempt of the Jews to hold out against the Romans at Massada in 70 AD, which ended with the suicide of those besieged in the fortress there, with the Prussian concentration camp at Börgermoor, whose inmates composed a song known as the Börgermoor-Lied. This song gave them a sense of identity, of home, and it was finally adopted even by the guards at the camp.



### Night Rode Him

Night rode him, he had come to his senses, the orphan's tunic was his flag,

no more going astray, it rode him straight -

It is, it is as though oranges hung in the privet, as though the so-ridden had nothing on but his first birth-marked, se-cret-speckled skin.

#### I Can Still See You

I can still see you: an echo that can be groped towards with antenna words, on the ridge of parting.

Your face quietly shies when suddenly there is lamplike brightness inside me, just at the point where most painfully one says, never.

### Wide-Open Tomorrow

I bite my way into you, my silence nestles into you,

we sound,
alone,
pastily
eternity's tones drip away,
croaked at by
the hodiernal
yesterday,

we travel,

largely the last amplifier received us:

the boosted heart pace outside in space, brought home to the axis of Earth.

# Sprinkle Ochre into My Eyes

Sprinkle ochre into my eyes: no longer, you live in them,

be sparing, of graveside supplements, be sparing,

walk up and down the stone rows on your hands,

with their dream graze the debased coinage, the scale of my temporal bone,

at the great road fork tell yourself to the ochre three times, nine times.

### Leap-Centuries

Leap-centuries, leapseconds, leapbirths, novembering, leapdeaths,

stacked in honeycomb troughs, 'bits on chips',

the menora poem from Berlin

(Unasylumed, unarchived, unwelfare-attended? Alive?),

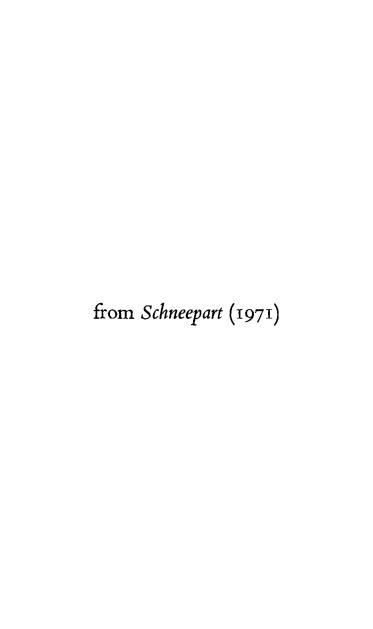
reading stations in the late word,

saving flame points in the sky,

comb lines under fire,

feelings, frostmandrelled,

cold start with haemoglobin.



#### The Broached Year

The broached year with its mouldering crusts of delusion bread.

Drink from my mouth.

### Illegibility

Illegibility of this world. All things twice over.

The strong clocks justify the splitting hour, hoarsely.

You, clamped into your deepest part, climb out of yourself for ever.

#### I Hear that the Axe has Flowered

I hear that the axe has flowered, I hear that the place can't be named,

I hear that the bread which looks at him heals the hanged man, the bread baked for him by his wife,

I hear that they call life our only refuge.

### Largo

You of the same mind, moor-wandering near one:

more-thandeathsized we lie together, the timeless one teems under our breathing eyelids,

the pair of blackbirds hangs beside us, under our whitely drifting companions up there, our

metastases.

## A Leaf, Treeless

A LEAF, treeless for Bertolt Brecht:

What times are these when a conversation is almost a crime because it includes so much made explicit?

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